

MARYLAND CASA PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

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**Department of Family Administration
Administrative Office of the Courts
Maryland Judicial Center
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Annapolis, Maryland 21401

MARYLAND CASA PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

1. AUTHORITY FOR THE CASA PROGRAM

The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program was authorized to operate in Maryland, subject to these performance standards, by the adoption, in 1989, of Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-830 of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEER AND STATUS IN THE COURT PROCEEDING

The Annotated Code of Maryland states that role of the Court Appointed Special Advocate is to:

1. Provide the court with background information to aid the court in making decisions in the child's best interest; and
2. Ensure that the child is provided appropriate case planning and services.

The CASA volunteer is considered a friend of the Court and does not have party status. The volunteer is considered an agent of the court and is appointed at the judge's discretion to represent the child's best interest. Volunteers are not represented by an attorney but should be provided access to legal counsel by the program.

3. PROGRAM OPERATION

CASA Programs shall be administered by a director who has been selected by the local entities who are sponsoring the CASA program and approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The minimum requirements for this appointment are:

1. A master's degree in the field of social work, psychology or child welfare-related field of study, or a bachelor's degree and an equivalent number of years of child welfare and/or non-profit management experience.
2. A minimum of 5 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
3. A minimum of 2 years experience in administration or supervision.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.
5. Knowledge of fundraising/development.

All supervisory staff shall have the following minimum qualifications:

1. Bachelor's degree in the field of social work, psychology or other clinically-oriented discipline.

2. A minimum of 2 years experience in the field of child abuse and neglect.
3. A minimum of 1 year experience in supervision of volunteers/staff is preferred.
4. Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the juvenile court system and the needs of abused and neglected children.

4. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The program director shall establish and maintain a structure designed to facilitate the recruitment, screening, training, and supervision of CASA volunteers by:

1. Developing and implementing an annual volunteer recruitment plan, including such strategies as meeting with relevant organizations for the purpose of recruiting their membership for volunteers and soliciting the print, radio and TV media to aid in this recruitment. Special efforts shall be made to recruit individuals who reflect the characteristics of the community of which they will be serving minimally, and, optimally, reflect the diversity of the children served.
2. Developing and implementing an application and screening process whereby applicants will be appropriately selected to participate in a pre-service training program.
3. Designing and conducting a pre-service training program that will educate the applicants about the following:
 - a. History of CASA;
 - b. Roles and Responsibilities of a CASA and program procedures; and the role of all the relevant agencies and professionals in the child welfare and juvenile court systems;
 - c. Cultural Awareness;
 - d. Dynamics and Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect;
 - e. Child Development and Permanency Planning;
 - f. Laws Affecting Children;
 - g. Communication and Information Gathering;
 - h. Juvenile Court System;
 - i. Advocacy Skills;
 - j. Court Report Writing;
 - k. Confidentiality requirements.

4. Establishing a procedure with the local Department of Social Services for screening CASA applicants for past allegations of child abuse and/or neglect.
5. Designing and implementing a supervisory process whereby CASAs will receive frequent and complete feedback of their CASA activities by:
 - a. Permitting no more than a 30 to 1 ratio of active CASA volunteers to supervisor. (Note: It is recognized that during the initial developmental stages of CASA programs, due to a temporary shortage in funding, this ratio may not always be met by a CASA program.)
 - b. Establishing and implementing a regular in-service training schedule designed to increase the CASAs' understanding of the dynamics of the population they are serving and consequently enhance their service provision.
6. Establishing either an Advisory Board and/or Board of Directors for the purpose of overseeing the operation of the program and/or providing technical assistance. The membership of an advisory board should include representation from agencies affected by this program but should be made up, primarily, of representatives of the corporate community and the private sector. Boards of directors must have the above representation.

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEER SCREENING AND SELECTION

The program director shall ensure that applicants meet minimal qualifications prior to certification as a CASA. A CASA must:

1. Be twenty-one years of age or older;
2. Complete an application;
3. Successfully complete the required 30-40 hours of CASA pre-service training;
4. Successfully complete a pre-training screening interview and post-training interview/assessment by the CASA staff;
5. Observe a juvenile court hearing(s);
6. Provide three positive character references;
7. Pass a criminal background check and be found to have not been convicted of or currently charged for the commission or attempt to commit: Murder; Child Abuse; Rape; Child Pornography; Child Abduction; Kidnapping of a Child; or a Sexual Offense as defined under the Criminal Law Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, §§ 3-305-30308, or any other charge that poses a threat to the safety and/or well-being of a child, indicates poor judgment and/or threatens the credibility of the program;

8. Pass a child abuse registry clearance conducted by the local Department of Social Services (if available);
9. Pass a driving record check conducted by the Motor Vehicle Administration, indicating no more than two points. Prospective volunteers who choose not to transport must still comply with the MVA check. Anyone whose driving record exceeds the above limit may be accepted with the provision that they not transport, however careful consideration must be given to the type, frequency and circumstances of the violations;
10. Provide car insurance information regarding the amount and type of coverage or sign a waiver stating he/she will not transport the child. Programs shall make volunteers aware of the liability issues involved in transporting children;
11. Commit to a minimum of one year service to the program;
12. Sign an oath of confidentiality;
13. Not be employed in a position and/or otherwise involved with an agency that might result in a conflict of interest on the part of the CASA volunteer;
14. Volunteers shall be officially appointed as a CASA via swearing in and/or specific order of the court.

6. TRANSFERS WITHIN THE STATE

CASA volunteers moving to another county or city within the state that has a CASA program shall be subject to the same screening process conducted for other applicants before being allowed to serve as a CASA volunteer in that county or city. The volunteer may be required to attend any or all units of the pre-service training, as determined by the program to which the applicant has applied before being allowed to serve as a CASA.

7. AUTHORITY FOR APPOINTMENT OF COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE AND CASE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

The CASA Program is authorized by an official Order of the Court, at the judge's discretion, to assign a volunteer to a child's case. Volunteers should be assigned at the earliest stages of the court proceedings and shall remain involved in their assigned cases until dismissal by official Order of the Court. Volunteers who terminate from their assigned cases prior to the conclusion of the court proceedings shall be replaced by the CASA program with other volunteers as soon as possible. A volunteer shall remain appointed to the case until the child is placed in a safe, permanent home or the appointment order is rescinded by the judge or the case is otherwise closed by the court.

Upon reviewing a case assignment, the Court-Appointed Special Advocate shall:

1. Review the Court Order and the case history;

2. Review the Juvenile Court File;
3. Meet with the CASA staff to develop the CASA Case Plan;
4. Schedule and attend appointments with relevant parties;
5. Complete required CASA forms and documentation;
6. Maintain the confidentiality of any and all information received on behalf of the child.

8. COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE RECORDS AND SUPERVISION

Upon beginning a case assignment, the Court-Appointed Special Advocate shall:

1. Maintain and submit at least monthly a CASA Contact Log, indicating the date, amount of time spent, and type of all CASA contacts.
2. Maintain and submit monthly a record of travel expenses incurred on the Expense Reimbursement form provided if program provides reimbursement and the CASA desires reimbursement of said expenses.
3. Provide to the Director or staff supervisor a court report, using the Court Report Format, for the assigned case to ensure timely submission to court and parties, according to court procedure.
4. Attend quarterly, individual, face-to-face supervisory meetings, as scheduled by the CASA staff.
5. Complete a minimum of 12 hours of in-service training each year.

9. VOLUNTEER DISMISSAL FROM PROGRAMS

The program director may dismiss a volunteer from the program when the volunteer:

1. Takes action without program or court approval which:
 - a. Endangers the child;
 - b. Is outside the role or powers of the CASA;
 - c. Violates a program policy, court rule, or law, or;
 - d. Contravenes program or court direction.
2. Fails to adequately perform a responsibility as a CASA.
 - a. Fails to maintain regular contact with the program office regarding CASA activities as

defined by the individual program; and

b. Fails to maintain regular contact with the assigned child and/or family as defined by the individual program.

3. Falsifies the volunteer application, misrepresents facts during the screening process, or commits an act which results in a substantial alteration of his/her qualifications as a CASA.

10. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE AND THE CHILD

Communications between a child and a CASA are not privileged. A CASA shall not assure the confidentiality of such communications. Incidents of abuse or neglect disclosed by a child or otherwise discovered by a CASA in addition to the original allegation or after a finding has been reached and treatment services begun, shall be immediately reported to the local Department of Social Services and the program staff.

11. LIABILITY

Volunteers have limited protection from liability while carrying out their responsibilities according to the CASA role, per Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article §3-830. Programs must carry all appropriate forms of liability insurance for the protection of volunteers, staff, board members and the organization.

12. RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CASA PROGRAMS, MARYLAND CASA ASSOCIATION AND NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION

An organization may not operate a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program in the State of Maryland without being approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. CASA programs must belong to and actively participate in the Maryland CASA Association, a statewide network of CASA programs, and are eligible for technical assistance and other benefits of membership. CASA programs must also be recognized by the National CASA Association as a CASA program. CASA programs must abide by any established Maryland and National CASA Association protocols regarding the recruitment of prospective volunteers and fund raising to prevent impeding other programs' efforts and those of the state and national organizations. CASA programs are not authorized to conduct home studies or evaluations of any kind at the request of other jurisdictions within or outside the state.